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**CLERK OF SUPREME COURT
OF WISCONSIN**

October 29, 2024

Clerk of Supreme Court
Attention: Deputy Clerk – Rules
PO Box 1688
Madison, WI 53701-1688

RE: Petition 24-05 Adjustment to Attorney Assessment for Public Interest Legal Services Funding

To the Justices of the Supreme Court of Wisconsin:

I am writing on behalf of the Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault (WCASA) in support of Petition 24-05 to increase the Public Interest Legal Services Fund (PILSF) assessment. As an organization, our mission is to create social change to end sexual violence. We believe that increasing access to civil legal aid is vital to the stabilization and dignity of our communities. This Petition is an important step in that direction.

An individual's ability to access civil legal aid can be lifesaving. Civil legal aid keeps people in their homes and in family-sustaining jobs, empowers individuals and families by resolving consumer debts and ensuring rightful access to income supports, secures support and protects the rights of crime victims, including survivors of sexual violence.

Access to legal help is distressingly difficult, particularly for low-income Wisconsinites. While one in seven Wisconsin residents are financially eligible for civil legal aid, legal aid providers are only able to provide help for 7% of the civil legal problems faced by Wisconsin's low-income residents. The gap between the need for services and their availability holds individuals and families back from achieving safety, stability, and economic security. At WCASA, we understand that increasing the Public Interest Legal Services Fund is one critical mechanism for increasing access to civil legal aid for our community and all of Wisconsin.

Our organization works closely with civil legal aid providers to help survivors navigate the legal system. The civil legal aid providers we work with help our mutual clients enforce their rights in the legal system and ensure their voice is heard in a court process often manipulated by offenders. When we can work together with legal aid providers, we can equip victims of crime with the tools to find a path forward to secure a safer future for themselves and their families. Our partnerships with legal aid providers plays a key role in providing wraparound support for survivors, with our legal partners providing legal advice and representation with critical legal issues. Sadly, we know that for every survivor that can access civil legal help, many more survivors cannot due to chronic underfunding of civil legal aid.



At WCASA, we see how housing instability can spiral a family deeper into poverty and increase the risk for victimization. People who experience homelessness are at increased risk of experiencing sexual violence, while survivors of sexual violence are at increased risk of becoming homeless. We also know that the impacts can extend far beyond one household, destabilizing entire communities and creating public health and safety concerns. Achieving housing stability is a key component of breaking the cycle of poverty and achieving economic security. Civil legal aid providers play a critical role in helping low-income tenants understand their rights, resolve disputes with landlords, secure habitable housing, and stay housed. Unfortunately, we know that for every tenant who can access legal help, many more are turned away simply due to lack of capacity of civil legal aid providers.

There are far more low-income Wisconsinites with civil legal problems than there are lawyers to help them. The reality is that many of those people face multiple legal problems concurrently. An investment in civil legal aid is an investment in justice and the future health of Wisconsin's legal system. Supporting an increase in PILSF moves us toward a future of due process for every Wisconsinite and recognizes the leadership role the legal profession can take in closing the justice gap. We hope the legal community will pave the way for increased access to justice through this investment in civil legal aid.

Therefore, we urge you to adopt Petition 24-05 to increase the PILSF assessment fee, which would increase the provision of civil legal services to low-income Wisconsinites. The positive impact of the Petition would reach far beyond the financial value of the assessment itself. Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to comment in support of this proposed rule.

Ian Henderson
Policy and Systems Director
Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault